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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN - POLL INDICATES PUBLIC SYMPATHIES ARE WITH
SOUTH OSSETIA AND RUSSIA, NOT WITH GEORGIA

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¶1. (U) Summary: The results of an opinion poll indicate that the Kazakhstani public has largely adopted the South Ossetian and Russian viewpoint with respect to the conflict in Georgia. Overall, 40.2 percent of poll respondents sympathized most with the South Ossetians, compared to just 2.7 percent with the Georgians. At the same time, 39.4 percent considered Georgia's military action to constitute a "crime against humanity," while just 5 percent viewed what Georgia did as a move against separatism. Approximately 50 percent of the respondents agreed that Russia's intervention was justified, while only 9 percent saw Russia's actions as aggression against an independent country. Astana residents were notably less supportive of the South Ossetians and Russians than residents of other regions. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Kazakhstan's Association of Sociologists and Political Scientists (ASIP) conducted a nationwide public opinion survey on the South Ossetia conflict during August 22-30, disseminating the results in a September 15 press release. (Note: Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence occurred midway through the polling process, on August 26. End Note.) ASIP surveyed 2895 residents of 16 cities and 14 rural district centers -- a sampling it termed to be representative of the population as a whole. ASIP reported overall survey results, as well as results by region for Astana and Almaty and for northern, southern, central, eastern, and western Kazakhstan.

¶3. (U) Asked which side in the conflict was "in the right", 34.2 percent of those polled responded South Ossetia and just 3.4 percent Georgia, while 33.8 percent maintained that both sides were in the right and 26.8 percent found the question "too difficult to answer." In response to a second question, 40.2 percent said they "sympathized" with the South Ossetians, just 2.7 percent with the Georgians, 19 percent with both sides, and 17.8 percent with neither; 26.8 percent found this question too difficult to answer.

¶4. (U) Nationwide, 39.4 percent of those polled agreed that Georgia's military action constituted "a crime against humanity" leading to the deaths of innocent civilians, while 5 percent considered Georgia's response to be a "battle agQ separatism;" the remainder were unable to chose between these two options. Approximately 50 percent maintained that Russian intervention in the conflict was justified "to end military action in the conflict zone," while 9 percent disagreed, seeing Russia's actions as "aggression against an independent country." Just over 39 percent of those polled found this question too difficult to respond to.

¶5. (U) Asked about the way to resolve the conflicts in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, 27 percent of those polled said the two regions should become independent, 12.3 percent said they should be joined to Russia, and less than 2 percent said they should remain within Georgia. Approximately 13 percent believed that the

conflicts could not be resolved, while 43Qcent found this question too difficult to answer.

¶16. (U) The pollsters did not report results by ethnicity of respondent. However, results reported by region indicate that the views of ethnic Kazakhs and those of ethnic Russians are in relative alignment, as the results for ethnic Kazakh-dominated southern and western Kazakhstan did not significantly diverge from those of heavily Russian northern, central, and eastern Kazakhstan. The main outlier in the survey was Astana, with residents of the capital refusing to answer the questions at a much higher rate than residents of other regions and demonstrating less sympathy toward the South Ossetian and Russian positions. For example, just 15.1 percent of Astana respondents considered Georgia's military action to be "a crime against humanity; in the remaining regions, from 37.7 percent (eastern Kazakhstan) to 43.0 percent (central Kazakhstan) of respondents saw the situation this way. (Note: Just under 80 percent of Astana respondents completely declined to answer this question, compared with 39 percent nationwide. End Note.) Among Astana respondents, only 28.6 percent considered Russia's intervention to be justified; in the other regions, from 42.4 percent (eastern Kazakhstan) to 58.0 percent (central Kazakhstan) saw Russia's actions as justified.

¶17. (U) Just 7.1 percent of Astana residents viewed independence for South Ossetia and Abkhazia as the solution to the two conflicts. By comparison, 16.5 percent of respondents in eastern Kazakhstan saw this as the solution, while from 25.9 percent to 33.8 percent of the residents of the remaining five regions agreed with this view. (Note: The fact that respondents in ethnic Russian-dominated eastern Kazakhstan were less sympathetic to the South Ossetian and Russian perspective on several questions than respondents nationwide is somewhat of a conundrum to us. This may indicate a flawed polling methodology for that region. End Note.)

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¶18. (SBU) Comment: The overall polling results are not entirely surprising. Most Kazakhstanis are getting their news about the South Ossetia situation from the Russian media, while very few are relying on western sources. Moreover, while the Kazakhstani government has given no public support to Russia on its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, President Nazarbayev has agreed with the Russians that the Georgians started the conflict and that Russia was justified in intervening to stop the bloodshed. Nevertheless, we still would have expected somewhat more sympathy for the Georgian perspective, especially among ethnic Kazakhs. The fact that the poll included some questions that may not have been up to U.S. polling standards may have skewed the results. That Astana was an outlier in the poll - with its residents expressing less sympathy for the South Ossetian and Russian perspectives -- confirms our sense that the country's governing elite, protective of Kazakhstan's own independence, viewed Russia's military intervention in the conflict with genuine concern. End Comment.

MILAS